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ARTICLE



# The 'Isle of Vice'? Youth, class and the post-war holiday on the Isle of Man

Pete Hodson

School of History, Anthropology, Politics and Philosophy, Queen's University, Belfast, Northern Ireland, UK

## ABSTRACT

This article broadens our knowledge of post-war holidaymaking (c. 1950–80) by adopting the Isle of Man as a case study. A popular holiday resort from the late nineteenth century, the Isle of Man experienced considerable political turbulence during the 1950s and 1960s about how best to stay competitive as a seaside resort, where authorities employed uniquely stringent methods to contain rowdiness and protect the island's 'respectable' atmosphere. The first two sections examine the leisure habits of the young and working class in a holiday context, integrating this analysis with perceptions of their behaviour gleaned from oral interviews with local residents. The concluding section explores how the presence of holidaymakers on the Isle of Man – uniquely among seaside resorts in the British Isles – informed (and in some cases emboldened) a sense of national identity. Oral history, complemented by the Hansard reports of the Isle of Man parliament and local press coverage, sheds light on the activities of the post-war working class at play, and how the presence of holidaymakers fortified Manx national consciousness.

## KEYWORDS

Holiday; leisure; youth; working-class; oral history

## Introduction

Located in the middle of the Irish Sea, flanked by Britain and Ireland, lies the Isle of Man. Despite its central geographic position in the British Isles, the Isle of Man retained home rule outside of Westminster's remit. For many British and Irish citizens, the Isle of Man was synonymous with holidaymaking. The island's permanent population of 50,000 swelled considerably between May and September, with 500,000 tourist arrivals each summer during the 1950s and 1960s.<sup>1</sup> Until the 1970s, 50% of Manx national income derived from the spending power of the visitor, and locals became extremely adept in extracting the maximum sum.<sup>2</sup>

Leisure historian John Walton has argued that the holiday was 'a place on the margin where the usual constraints on respectability and decorum in public behaviour might be pushed aside in the interests of holiday hedonism'.<sup>3</sup> The holiday, an unfamiliar space removed from the more usual community and occupation-centred analyses, is a useful filter to capture evidence of how youths and the working class – groups seen as representative of general hopes and fears about the nation – negotiated the shifting social terrain of

**CONTACT** Pete Hodson  [phodson01@qub.ac.uk](mailto:phodson01@qub.ac.uk)  School of History, Anthropology, Politics and Philosophy, Queen's University, Belfast, Northern Ireland, UK

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post-war Britain.<sup>4</sup> The working-class holidaymakers explored in the first section, 'Class-on-sea', were welcomed with a degree of trepidation. Douglas, 'the Naples of Northern Europe', enticed the fun-seeking – and comparatively affluent – working classes, who, at times, were considered an affront to the respectable image that the island sought to project.<sup>5</sup> The Isle of Man Tourist Board marketed the island as a place where all holiday expectations could be fulfilled. This was achieved through social demarcation as individual boarding houses and resorts around the island strove to attract and maintain their appeal to a particular clientele. Although conceived of in social class terms by the Tourist Board, it will be argued that, in reality, segregation in accordance with leisure preferences occurred as much *within* as *between* social classes.

The 'youth problem', examined in the second section 'Youth on holiday', was particularly conspicuous in the Isle of Man from the mid-1950s. Manx people struggled to reconcile the competing interests of young visitors with local moral expectations. The youth market was exploited with enthusiasm, but the teenager was also feared – and closely monitored. Growing anxiety about post-war youths was not unique to the Isle of Man, but the Manx Government's decision to expand judicial corporal punishment powers differed markedly to elsewhere in the UK. Anxieties surrounding affluence, permissiveness and class underpinned this unique legislative reaction, which is contrasted in this article with reference to the cautious approach adopted in Britain. A seaside resort's economic survival depended on remaining attractive to holidaymakers. Moral panic about delinquent behaviour (notably promiscuity and alcoholic overindulgence) fuelled, allegedly, by the 'irresponsible affluence' of post-war youths was particularly acute in such areas.<sup>6</sup> As noted elsewhere, and argued here in relation to holiday-making, apprehensions about the 'youth problem' and working class economic gains in post-war Britain were tinged with hyperbole.<sup>7</sup> Mischief, moral laxness and guilt-free consumerism occurred a great deal less than conformity, carnal restraint and thriftiness.

Summer visitors transformed the Isle of Man into a premier holiday resort – a process that excited many, but worried those fearful of the consequences to national identity. The final section, 'Manxness and holidaymaking', argues that visitor behaviour, particularly that of the young and working class, supplied values against which 'Manxness' was defined and articulated. Pandering to changing holidaymaker desires that threatened to dilute traditional Manx values became the focus of intense political wrangling. The issue of Sunday pub opening, intended to benefit the tourist sector, provoked consternation and exposed deep fissures in Manx society. The Methodist Church (an influential force in island life) revived temperance lobbying and evangelical Sabbatarianism, a regional example that diversifies our understanding of secularisation in the post-war British Isles.<sup>8</sup> In subtle (but important) ways, the concluding section expands on the limited scholarly work on Celtic nationalism in peripheral regions of the British Isles by emphasising the implications of tourism on Manx identity. In addition to addressing the Blackpool bias of existing seaside leisure studies, the article offers glimpses into the regional/national tensions at play in holiday resorts, stimulated by the presence of holidaymakers, which is absent in existing leisure historiography.

The article draws on oral interviews conducted by Manx National Heritage around the turn of the Millennium with boarding-house keepers and individuals involved in tourist businesses. John Beckerson used a limited number of excerpts in his book *Holiday isle*, but the 54 interviews (deposited at the Manx Museum, Douglas) have not been utilised for any other significant research purposes. *Holiday isle*, alongside John Belchem's edited collection *A new*

*history of the Isle of Man*, remains the core example of twentieth-century Manx social and economic historiography – an area suffering from perceptible academic neglect, which this article seeks to rectify. Oral history interviews expose ‘the interplay between self and society’ and provide an opportunity to piece together how Manx citizens viewed tourism, the national economic life-blood.<sup>9</sup> These interviews are complemented by a small number of holidaymaker testimonies gathered by the author. Oral history is particularly useful for challenging some of the more simplistic assumptions about holidaymakers found in press reports and parliamentary debates. The example of seaside sex in particular demonstrates how oral testimonies can expose hidden meanings and archival silences.<sup>10</sup>

## Class-on-sea

The democratisation of the seaside holiday facilitated the growth of the Isle of Man as a premier holiday resort in the late nineteenth century. Commercialisation remained largely confined to Douglas, the Manx capital and largest resort. With its high-capacity boarding houses and entertainment venues, Douglas gained the hallmarks of a working-class playground but avoided assuming a full-blown Blackpool-like atmosphere. The Isle of Man attracted all social classes – but spatial delineation in accordance with socio-economic boundaries and cultural preferences was evident. Despite providing Manx people with economic sustenance, holidaymakers were sometimes viewed with thinly disguised disdain. Landladies, clerics and politicians alike were unsettled at the plebeian atmosphere of Douglas which was thought to deter the more lucrative middle-class market.

The steamer crossing to the Isle of Man exposed subtle class stratification that was mirrored in Manx holiday resorts. Travelling to the island by steamer in 1966, a *Daily Express* reporter wryly noted ‘in the [ship’s first class] dining room, heavy silver on the tables, discreet service in heavy panelled surroundings. On the decks, hordes of plump Lancashire girls engaged in a never-ending love affair with Radio Caroline’.<sup>11</sup> In the resorts themselves, the slight nuances between outwardly similar boarding houses reflected subtle – but significant – economic gradations. Exactly where the ‘tourist gaze’ focused depended on socio-economic status.<sup>12</sup> One Douglas hotelier argued that seafront hotels ‘on the promenade were better than the ones on the back streets. When you got right up to the back of Douglas it was taking the general factory workers’ – the ‘*really* working class’ as another promenade hotelier put it.<sup>13</sup> Spatial zoning was highly evident with the middle classes tending to elude Douglas, packed with the ‘£20-to-spend devil-may-care, let’s-sit-on-the-beach-with-a-transistor-tripper’, in favour of the smaller, more genteel, resorts dotted around the island.<sup>14</sup>

After 1945, unprecedented numbers of working-class families could afford an extended stay at the seaside. Industrial areas, from Burnley to Belfast, claimed a holiday week on the Isle of Man between late May and early September each summer. Conflicting somewhat with depictions of the working-class holiday as an enjoyable collective event, the holiday, to the frustration of some, did not provide an *escape from* but a *relocation of* community.<sup>15</sup> The working-class holidaymaker expected to see familiar faces and ‘wanted to meet strangers certainly, but strangers from just around the corner’.<sup>16</sup> Whilst new friendships were forged, the holiday also enabled the furtherance of existing acquaintances. Not all working-class families were enthused at such a prospect. Caroline Martin’s mother insisted that the family holidayed during August, outside of Belfast’s mid-July holiday season. Mrs Martin’s reasoning was ‘that it [a July

visit] wasn't a holiday because you bumped into your next-door neighbour'.<sup>17</sup> Joanna Bourke has questioned the desirability of working-class neighbourliness which might explain the Martins' rationale: 'for some, close living may be a celebration of conviviality: for others [it was] stifling and alienating'.<sup>18</sup>

Ross McKibbin's discussion of working-class self-awareness of 'roughness' and 'respectability' is particularly useful in this context. Leisure – or, precisely, how it was taken and where, was a key metric used to categorise the self and others.<sup>19</sup> Holidaymaking was a highly visible extension of this social demarcation. On holiday, as daily rhythms were dictated solely by leisure, not work, working-class families possessed a heightened consciousness of where they and others were located in this framework. Some families were aware that choosing the Isle of Man as their holiday destination would endow them with respectability vis-à-vis neighbours. A Manx holiday, rather than a jaunt to the nearest mainland seaside resort, was likely to provoke jealousy and demonstrated to the rest of the street what careful budgeting could achieve. Mass-Observation noted that 'the difference between the island and the mainland is rather like that between the vault and the lounge in the pub. You don't naturally walk into the more expensive room, and you get a little social prestige from being in a more expensive place'.<sup>20</sup> This social prestige even percolated down to schoolyard level. A Manchester school-boy in the 1960s, Graham Hodson recalled 'mates would say "I'm going to Rhyl in North Wales" or "Blackpool" and I was like "yeah, I'm going to the Isle of Man" ... thinking it was slightly better than somewhere else'.<sup>21</sup> A Manx holiday lifted working-class families up the pecking order, distinguishing them from neighbours in receipt of broadly similar wages and living in the same neighbourhood.

Manx public figures, nonetheless, tended to view the working class as a lumpen entity – crass, thrill-seeking and frustratingly unappreciative of the island's amenities beyond the pubs of Douglas. The activities of working-class holidaymakers were, however, notably disparate. For some, holiday enjoyment was found at the pub, variety show, cinema and dance hall. For others, the 'fish-and-chip atmosphere of Douglas' was something to be actively avoided and outdoor pursuits such as hiking and fishing were pursued instead.<sup>22</sup> Jon Lawrence has noted that popular discourses have tended to reduce 'the diversity of working-class life ... [to] stereotypes that would cast a long cultural shadow across post-war Britain'.<sup>23</sup> The hard-drinking pigeon fancier was portrayed as the norm, at the expense of other leisure interests that were seen as aberrant or middle class. Sizeable numbers of working-class holidaymakers elided cultural expectations and simply 'weren't Douglas people'.<sup>24</sup> Douglas was geared to cater for the mass market, but other resorts, like Peel, defined themselves against the 'artificial atmosphere of commercialised gaiety' on offer in the capital.<sup>25</sup> The Martin family found the 'talent shows, competitions and swimming galas ... more respectable entertainment for want of a better word' on offer in the family resort of Port Erin more alluring than the 'tacky' atmosphere of Douglas.<sup>26</sup> A peaceful holiday in quieter Manx resorts appealed to visitors from all social classes, seeking respite from urban life. Class background did not exclusively determine holidaymakers' leisure preferences.

Wherever working-class visitors chose to stay and whatever their leisure pursuits, the 'holiday experience was remarkably regulated'.<sup>27</sup> Only from the early 1970s did working-class holidaymakers manage to break free from the strict conventions of the boarding-house regime. In response to demand, landladies provided late-keys and relaxed meal times, which improved holidaymaker autonomy. In earlier decades, landladies rigidly enforced meal and locking-up times. A *Sunday Mirror* journalist described the 'squalid pantomime'

of kicking-out time in Douglas, where drunken revellers 'wail: "Our landladies won't let us in after midnight. We've nowhere to go till they open the doors at breakfast time"''.<sup>28</sup> Even bath times were tightly controlled. One thrifty Douglas landlady, tired of guests 'using my hot water ... locked the bathroom door' and instructed visitors to 'go to the public baths' if they wanted anything more than a quick scrub from a hand-basin.<sup>29</sup> Understandably, guests often found these regulations oppressive. Caroline Martin, recalling her first Manx holiday in 1969, described her boarding house as 'very, very, very strict. Children had to be on their best behaviour, it was really run quite regimentally'.<sup>30</sup>

Isle of Man authorities staunchly refused to tolerate working-class raucousness as the norm. The prevailing atmosphere of resorts was engineered and monitored by tourist authorities. Tourist Board marketing strategies designed to entice the 'better class of visitor ... the £50 types' paid few dividends; the 'visiting industry' (the colloquial term for the tourist trade) remained stubbornly tied to the working-class pound.<sup>31</sup> From the 1950s, in an attempt to prevent the Isle of Man from becoming synonymous with Douglas (with its plebeian image), the Tourist Board aggressively marketed smaller Manx resorts to broaden the island's appeal. Guidebooks reminded potential visitors that the Isle of Man was 'not just one resort but many resorts' with an 'amazing variety of scenery and attractions'.<sup>32</sup> Peel, Ramsey, Port Erin and Port St. Mary were promoted as 'respectable' resorts that had 'resisted the incursions of the modern age of discos, blaring loudspeakers and tinselled pageantry'.<sup>33</sup> This strategy was conceived of in class terms, but in reality cut across class divisions. Further to Cooper and Jackson's claim that the Isle of Man 'managed to solve difficulties of confrontation between social groups by segmenting its product ... by the development of zones of varying social tone', stratification occurred as much *within* as *between* the social classes.<sup>34</sup>

Given the vital importance of the visiting industry to the Manx economy, Tynwald, the Isle of Man's bicameral parliament, legislated extensively to safeguard the wellspring of national prosperity. Political self-determination conferred unique powers on Manx elected representatives not available to other seaside authorities. Manx parliamentarians were cautious about endorsing legislative moves designed to liberalise the holiday experience, especially bills thought to encourage permissive behaviour. Most of the 24 members of the House of Keys, the democratically elected chamber, were (and remain) independents representing local interest groups.<sup>35</sup> In the post-war period, urban Members of the House of Keys (MHKs) tended to defend Manx tourist commerce and rural MHKs protected 'traditional' Manx values. This rural/urban, conservative/liberal (and often Methodist/secular) divide formed the core cleavage in Manx politics around which MHKs coalesced. Influencing (and often undermining) attempts to maintain the Isle of Man's appeal as a holiday destination lurked a deeply conservative social impulse. Anxieties heightened in the 1950s, as the disposable income and leisure expectations of the average visitor increased.

Concerns about the prospect of a Monte Carlo-style casino – the first in the British Isles – in Douglas, gave rise to significant political wrangling and best illustrates Manx concerns about holidaymakers' socio-economic background. As Carolyn Downs explains, gambling had long been an integral component of the working-class holiday. The 'relaxation of social norms on holiday' encouraged those that refrained from gambling at home to try their hand at modest cash betting in commercial arcades.<sup>36</sup> For many holidaymakers, the seaside was a place that made them 'freer with their pennies'.<sup>37</sup> The casino debate saw political tensions reach fever pitch. Norman Crowe, a sheep farmer and MHK for the rural Michael constituency, argued that a casino would be a 'very dangerous and insidious temptation to our residents and visitors



alike'.<sup>38</sup> Henry Corlett, MHK for the largely agricultural Glenfaba constituency, concurred, proclaiming a casino would attract 'a certain class of undesirable parasites'.<sup>39</sup> In a speech drowned out by cries of 'shame' by fellow members, Cecil McFee, MHK and a Methodist preacher, claimed he 'would rather be controlled by Whitehall than by London gambling sharks'.<sup>40</sup> Some politicians portrayed casino gambling as an act that could subvert the Isle of Man's respectability, but also one that surrendered national sovereignty by making the Manx Treasury subservient to the taxation revenue procured from multinational gambling magnates.

The Manx press, prone to bouts of moral outrage, adopted an unusually balanced stance. The *Isle of Man Examiner* pointed out the irony that 'thousands of football pool coupons leave the island every Friday – mailbags full of them. Housey-housey sessions are held regularly all over the island . . . the bookies are busy all week'.<sup>41</sup> Letters to newspaper editors were, as ever, fiercely opinionated. A Mr Hartley of Birmingham wrote to the *Isle of Man Times* in 1956 alleging that 'vice, corruption, depravity, violence and even suicide are inseparable from large-scale gambling', and that 'should this immoral project be allowed to take shape we shall soon know the Isle of Man as the "Isle of Vice"'.<sup>42</sup> Ernest Stenning, Archdeacon of Man, warned his congregation to expect 'promenade prostitutes' – 'women with long fingers like claws and noses like eagles' beaks raking in the money and watching every turn of the wheel' – afflicted with 'jackpot fever'.<sup>43</sup> A poll conducted by the *Isle of Man Examiner* in 1961 revealed a distinct rural–urban divide in opinion on the vexed casino question. 88.5% of Manx people in rural areas opposed a continental-style casino, but 63% of town residents, reliant on tourism, were in favour.<sup>44</sup>

Following acrimonious debate in the House of Keys, the Casino Bill passed in March 1961 by 15 votes to 9. The Castle Mona Hotel opened a small casino in 1963. This was followed in 1966 by a purpose-built complex on Douglas promenade, opened by James Bond actor Sean Connery. Anxious politicians and members of the public were reassured that the casino would be subject to tight regulation, and that unruly behaviour would not be tolerated. In practice, this meant defending the existing policy of social zoning and preventing working-class overindulgence from deterring the civilised clientele that casino owners had in mind. The increased affluence of post-war visitors also stimulated particular concerns about young holidaymakers – how would their heightened leisure expectations be accommodated without offending Manx sensibilities, and the Isle of Man's image as a respectable seaside resort?

## Youth on holiday

In the 1950s and 1960s, Douglas accommodated and entertained twice the number of 16–20 year olds compared to British resorts.<sup>45</sup> The sheer numbers of holidaymaking youths in Douglas generated local angst, fuelled by atypical incidents of hooliganism and violence. The post-war years witnessed the 'institutionalisation of youth' as a distinct cohort no longer fully integrated into the social mainstream.<sup>46</sup> Youths were positioned at the vanguard of working-class 'guilt-free commitment to pleasure and immediate satisfaction'.<sup>47</sup> In the five years after the war, 'the average real wage of teenagers increased at twice the adult rate' and continued to climb steadily throughout the 1950s.<sup>48</sup> Many working-class youths found themselves able to sustain a contribution to the family economy and support their own leisure aspirations. As Todd and Young have noted, teenage conspicuous consumption was often actively encouraged by parents, keen for their children to 'carve out a very different kind of life'



compared to their own pre-war experiences.<sup>49</sup> Greater fiscal autonomy also broadened the horizons of youths. From the early 1950s a seaside holiday, or at very least a day excursion, was within the grasp of most young people.

The arrival of thousands of young, thrill-seeking visitors also stimulated parental fears. Holidaymakers arrived armed with cash, but were also suspected of harbouring corrupt ideals that would 'divert the minds of young Manx people'.<sup>50</sup> Youths from 'across the water', one anxious Manx parent opined, 'demonstrated quite different standards of behaviour than the ones our teenagers have been taught'.<sup>51</sup> Another Douglas mother 'wouldn't dream of letting my two young daughters go to the beach during the season. There are teenagers making love openly down there – completely shameless'.<sup>52</sup> Contact, however, was unavoidable in the summer months as the island thronged with holidaymakers. For Manx youths residing in outlying towns and villages, Douglas during the summer season exerted a magnetic appeal.

The fear of affluence-induced juvenile delinquency crystallised around the Teddy Boy. The Ted, conspicuously clad in Edwardian clothing, first emerged in London's working-class districts in the early 1950s. Signs of a summer Teddy Boy invasion were nervously awaited on the Isle of Man, where the Manx press seized upon isolated violent incidents to advance a coercive agenda. Widely considered 'an evil that must be stamped out', the Teddy Boy electrified Manx debates about young people.<sup>53</sup> Whilst Manx people reliant on the visiting industry gleaned the maximum sums from moneyed youths, they also expressed the view that 'the trouble with the youth of today is due to higher wages'.<sup>54</sup> The presumed symbiotic link between affluence and juvenile crime proved troublesome for islanders as the desire to exploit the youth market was tempered by the desire to control the teenage consumer.

Being a Teddy Boy was as much about image as cultural preference. Not all youths wearing Edwardian-style suits derived pleasure from 'flick-knife stabbings and gang feuds', but the distinctive fashion choice became – irrespective of reality – equated with violence.<sup>55</sup> Manx newspaper coverage was vitriolic. The Teddy Boy symbolised wider moral anxieties, but on the Isle of Man the presence of the Ted also had dangerous economic implications. The visiting industry was the lifeblood of the island's over-specialised economy; Manx prosperity was tied to the disposable income of the holidaymaker. Tourism was seasonal; cyclical unemployment afflicted the island and many citizens struggled financially during the lean winter months. The Manx Government established public works schemes to soak up unemployment, and many young Manx people sought winter work in Britain.<sup>56</sup> Failing to stay competitive as a popular holiday resort, a government report in 1969 noted, 'could only mean that the standard of living of the Isle of Man would disappear and the island would become depopulated'.<sup>57</sup> Businesses and politicians blamed falling visitor numbers on juvenile holiday crime discouraging respectable family holidaymakers.

Prevailing opinion about how to tackle 'the Teddy Boy blight' erred strongly on the side of coercion.<sup>58</sup> Recommendations ranged from 'a good birch' to the formation of 'local vigilante groups' augmented by 'mounted police' to combat the Teds when they 'crawl up the sewers'.<sup>59</sup> Whilst public opinion differed on the ferocity of punishment, a general consensus emerged favouring retributive violence. Judicial corporal punishment was considered preferable to hearing 'them snigger when they have to pay a fine because they've got bags of money'.<sup>60</sup> The image of youths drawing upon a bottomless pit of money was frequently invoked but few, if any, young visitors had the means to sustain a week of carefree spending. Caroline Martin, holidaying on the island as a teenager in the 1970s, recalled that 'there wouldn't have been a lot spent, no throwing

caution to the wind'.<sup>61</sup> A 1955 Gallup poll, based on 2,500 responses, found that '61% [of Manx holidaymakers] were in a below average income group, a higher proportion than in most other resorts, no doubt a reflection of the youth element'.<sup>62</sup>

The Isle of Man Chief Constable's report of 1956 noted that juvenile crime was 'possibly the highest on record' with convictions increasing from 156 in 1955 to 236 in 1956.<sup>63</sup> The 1956 and 1957 summer seasons did, on the surface, witness a modest rise in rowdy behaviour, but also reflected disproportionate police attention on youth and propensity to make more arrests. Tenuous links between isolated acts of vandalism and the wider Ted phenomenon were made by Manx newspapers, eager for the police to 'put the damper on the Teddy Boys and tough nuts'.<sup>64</sup> Stanley Cohen's analysis of press capacity to generate moral panic over the 1960s Mods and Rockers clashes is applicable to the Ted precedent. Cohen argues that the media 'have long acted as agents of moral indignation' with the power to elicit full-blown cultural confrontation through the use of 'sensational headlines ... [and] melodramatic vocabulary'.<sup>65</sup> For image-conscious seaside towns, the need to arrest unruly behaviour was also considered economically imperative. One irate Douglas resident, writing to the *Mona's Herald* in 1957, argued that the Isle of Man risked degenerating into a 'Mecca for toughs and trollops' who would ruin the family atmosphere the Tourist Board was so keen to project.<sup>66</sup>

Richard Grayson's study of the British response to the seaside Mods and Rockers clashes exposes how popular preference for retribution against unruly juveniles was not unique to the Isle of Man. Residents of resorts in southern England lobbied local government and constituency MPs to toughen judicial powers. Local councils advocated 'the reintroduction of corporal punishment, the establishment of non-military national service and the confiscation of driving licenses'.<sup>67</sup> The opinion of tourist business owners was more fervent. One Clacton hotelier opined that 'bringing back the birch will work, it must work. Take the Isle of Man; they used the birch when they had this trouble and as far as I know, none of those thugs ever went back'.<sup>68</sup> The Manx public did not exhibit an unusual penchant for corporal punishment. Divergence occurred at a parliamentary level. Whereas the 'British state declined to take drastic measures', Tynwald shared the public instinct to mete out physical punishment to teenage transgressors.<sup>69</sup>

The late 1950s summer seasons were, if local press reports are taken at face value, extremely volatile. Actual incidents of Teddy Boy terror were few and far between. The incident that appeared to provoke the most disquiet in 1957 involved a youth squirting a water pistol at sunbathers filled with either tomato ketchup or urine; contemporary Manx newspaper reports offer no consensus.<sup>70</sup> As Cohen argues, the conditions for moral panic need not rely on substantive evidence. Igniting public furore in the summers of the late 1950s required only the smallest of sparks. The seeds of moral panic, disseminated by the British press, quickly took root on the Isle of Man. Businesses, police and judiciary alike braced themselves for trouble. The owner of the Majestic Hotel in Douglas felt compelled to advertise at the start of the 1959 season that 'no person wearing Edwardian style clothing will be admitted'.<sup>71</sup> Ironically, by 1959 the Teddy Boy was virtually extinct, hounded out of existence by a hostile public and changing cultural taste.<sup>72</sup> The youth question rumbled on nonetheless; the dearth of drainpipe trousers did not diminish resolve to prevent future delinquent outbreaks.

Tynwald's response to the youth problem was distinctive. Several years prior to the Teddy Boy panic, the *Mona's Herald* smugly noted that 'the [British] system of treating

young criminals leniently has proved a dismal failure, and has led to the belief that the law can be treated with contemptuous disdain'.<sup>73</sup> Judicial corporal punishment remained on the Manx statute books for several decades after Clement Attlee's government repealed its use in Britain in 1948. Manx legislative evolution shadowed Westminster on many issues but deviated noticeably in the social sphere. Whereas calls for physical retribution were confined to a small number of 'Conservative die-hards' in the House of Commons, this view formed the majority sentiment in the House of Keys.<sup>74</sup> Legislation passed in 1960 expanded corporal punishment powers, permitting male youths (females were exempt) up to the age of 21 (rising from 14) to face up to 12 strokes of the birch reassuring, as one MHK opined, 'visitors to our shores [that they] may feel secure in the knowledge that it is unlikely that they will be subjected to the attacks by the gangs of hooligans which the adjacent island is incapable of dealing with'.<sup>75</sup> Liberal voices in the Keys were audible, but eclipsed by the combined strength of public and media pressure. J.E. Callister, MHK for Douglas North, reflecting on birch-use in 1963, argued 'we are being sneered and laughed at as an out-dated and primeval country'.<sup>76</sup>

Visiting youths in the 1960s and 1970s were well aware of the birch. Holidaying in Douglas in the early 1960s, Belfast-born British Telecom engineer Richard Harrison remarked that the use of the birch on the Isle of Man 'was common knowledge' among his friends.<sup>77</sup> He added that bearing in mind 'you'd get a cat-o-nine tails [sic] if you were bad probably kept a lid on things'.<sup>78</sup> Manx stockbroker Robert Scott argued the birch was 'a deterrent because people used to come off the boat when we brought back [sic] the birch and say: "We'd better be careful lads, they've got the birch"'.<sup>79</sup> Such testimony suggests that the 1960 Summary Jurisdiction Act was indeed a powerful propaganda weapon, keeping rowdiness at bay and the Isle of Man's reputation intact. It is unlikely, however, that male youths stayed away from the island because they were mindful of judicial corporal punishment. What deterred youths from the Isle of Man from the mid-1960s was not the birch, but its climate and increasingly outdated leisure provision.

The Irish Sea, a physical barrier against parental and neighbourly supervision, appears to have afforded many youths the licence to make mischief on the Isle of Man with many dabbling in alcohol for the first time, as well as seeking sexual experience. Anxiety about sexual overindulgence loomed large over debates about post-war youths. More broadly, as Claire Langhamer has argued, heterosexual love in post-war Britain underwent 'significant discursive change and emotional instability' as relationship expectations proved harder to meet.<sup>80</sup> Love (and sex) assumed an extra-marital character as 'social obligation' was subsumed by 'self-actualisation'.<sup>81</sup> The holiday was 'steeped in sexual legend' and is a useful lens for capturing evidence of shifting sexual ethics.<sup>82</sup> Many youths arrived on the Isle of Man with high (s)expectations. Manx press focus on sex in the 1950s and 1960s is noticeably absent, other than fleeting allusions to 'immoral behaviour in back lanes in Douglas'.<sup>83</sup> The oral testimony of holidaymakers and landladies hints at the extent of seaside sex, unreported in newspapers owing to fears about harming Douglas' reputation.

Motivated by different reasons, the Manx boarding-house keeper kept a vigilant eye on her young guests. Landladies were also wary of 'their girls [staff] having too much "fun", entering into romances and having flings with holidaymakers'.<sup>84</sup> Youths were a persistent worry for the Manx landlady, conscious of the need to uphold certain

standards in her house and avoid gaining a licentious reputation. Others were informed by religious sensibilities and the need to combat signs of incipient moral decay. The *Liverpool Echo* somewhat unfairly opined in a piece about Manx social attitudes: 'scratch a Manxman – and even more a Manxwoman – you are likely to find a puritan at heart'.<sup>85</sup> As John Walton's research illustrates, the seaside landlady may have ruled her roost with iron discipline, but did so primarily for reasons of economic self-defence.<sup>86</sup> Even for those hoteliers that did not consider 'any girl who wanted to be out after 10.30 was obviously a prostitute', certain levels of decency were upheld for reasons of economic survival.<sup>87</sup> Douglas landlady Hilary Guard stated she 'couldn't care less morally ... if they had done it quietly it would have been great'.<sup>88</sup> Youths, 'going in and out of each other's bedrooms like flies', spoiled the quiet, family atmosphere that hard-pressed landladies strove to cultivate.<sup>89</sup>

Other hoteliers took a more moralistic view. The owner of the 400-room Alexandra Hotel employed porters to 'walk along the corridors when they went to bed at night' and challenge those suspected of sexual misdemeanour.<sup>90</sup> Weary of nocturnal policing and holding back the tide of permissiveness, many hoteliers simply stopped taking young guests. Tourist traffic was buoyant enough for most landladies to cherry-pick custom from certain age cohorts. Reflecting on her time as a Douglas landlady, between the 1950s and 1970s, Megan Creer proudly asserted that 'I never had a gang of lads in, except for TT [Tourist Trophy] week but the motorcycle enthusiasts are decent, you see'.<sup>91</sup> Aside from concerns about sexual impropriety, youth vigour rattled the fatigued hotelier; yet a minority presciently observed the large measure of behavioural continuity. One cool-headed Douglas councillor called upon ratepayers to distinguish 'between what some people call hooliganism and what others would only describe as high spirits. After all this is a holiday resort and young people come here to enjoy themselves'.<sup>92</sup>

Despite anecdotal evidence that sex was prevalent and easily obtainable on holiday, the chances are that only a minority fulfilled their sexual aspirations. Bill Osgerby writes that 'during the fifties and sixties youngsters obviously did have sexual experiences outside marriage but, even in the "swinging sixties", young people's sexual activity was restrained and even furtive'.<sup>93</sup> On holiday, even if a partner was picked up at a dance the chances of smuggling him/her past the omnipotent landlady before lock-up were slim. It would be wrong, however, to conclude that Manx landladies actively sought to stifle sex among young guests on the grounds that it caused personal offence. Keeping a boarding house respectable remained the primary motivation; earning a scandalous reputation could spell economic disaster. Oral history suggests that anxiety among hoteliers receded during the 1970s. Boarding-house regulations relaxed considerably and guests were able to come and go when and with whom they wished. It is likely, as a result, that the logistical scope (if nothing else) for greater youth sexual activity increased.

The holiday was indeed a place where 'masks worn in everyday life slipped' but youths, on the whole, remained both 'conservative and quiescent' in their attitudes and leisure habits.<sup>94</sup> The spectacle of raucous behaviour in Douglas was nothing new; what changed in the post-war period, explored in this article using the example of the Ted, was the perception (and fear) of youth's aggressive separateness. The new-found (or, perhaps, rediscovered) cultural autonomy of youth was underpinned by money in quantities which both unsettled and excited those working in the visiting industry.

However, the age and class background of holidaymakers were not the sole causes for concern. Cultural, as well as moral anxiety, was aroused by the large summer contingent of visitors from foreign shores.

### Manxness and holidaymakers

The Isle of Man, 'as exotic a place as you could get in the British Isles', was able to deploy distinct marketing strategies in ways unavailable to mainland seaside resorts.<sup>95</sup> The Tourist Board slogan 'come abroad to the Isle of Man' promised holidaymakers 'a continental atmosphere without the snags'.<sup>96</sup> The Board promoted the 'Manxness of Man ... [through] the use of Gaelic signs and national symbols ... to give the tourist the feeling that he is abroad'.<sup>97</sup> The tone shifted according to the intended audience. Bill Quayle, Tourist Board Chairman, interviewed by BBC Scotland in 1962, proclaimed 'we are Celts, so are you' and encouraged Scottish people to holiday on the island for 'a tribal get-together'.<sup>98</sup> Elsewhere, emphasising 'continental' Manx exoticism was qualified by reassurance that the Isle of Man was 'so foreign in some respects and so typically English in others'.<sup>99</sup> Bill Quayle, asked why prospective holidaymakers should not travel to Spain for a real taste of the continent, frostily replied 'not everybody likes olive oil for every meal, you know'.<sup>100</sup> From the 1970s, the Manx tourist industry faced stiff competition from foreign package holidays offering genuine continental conditions (and, importantly, weather). In response, the exotic aspect was downplayed in guidebooks and replaced with increased emphasis on Manx cultural distinctiveness in a British Isles context.

The 'summer flood of Saxon trippers' galvanised Manx national consciousness and engendered a sense of cultural Anglophobia in some quarters.<sup>101</sup> Staunch Manx nationalists, a small yet vocal minority, criticised the visiting industry on the grounds that holidaymakers were harbingers of cultural homogenisation. John Belchem, in his valuable contribution exploring Manx disdain for working-class trippers in the late nineteenth century, argued that nationalists were deeply apprehensive about the Isle of Man being reduced to 'a piece of Lancashire gone adrift'.<sup>102</sup> Like their Irish counterparts, nationalists feared creeping Anglicisation would transform Manx people into 'mere West Britons'.<sup>103</sup> There were similar anxieties in the post-war era. The Manx delegate at the 1955 Celtic Congress (an organisation established to strengthen multi-lateral relations between the Celtic regions) argued that 'the visiting industry appears to be the most hostile factor attacking Manx national life'.<sup>104</sup> Manx nationalists welcomed middle-class antiquarians such as John Betjeman, a frequent visitor with a keen interest in Manx culture. The working-class visitor on the other hand, blissfully (and contentedly) ignorant of Manx Celticism, incensed ardent Manx patriots and visiting cultural anthropologists.

Cultural conflict between holidaymakers and those defending Manx morality was particularly acute surrounding the issue of alcohol. Attempts to pass a Sunday opening bill in response to visitor demand were contested and repeatedly fell on stony ground, with Manx opinion divided along rural/urban and Methodist/secular lines. Commercial pressure to legalise Sunday alcohol sales revived Sabbatarianism to prevent the Isle of Man's 'first step to becoming another Blackpool'.<sup>105</sup> Young and working-class tourists sat squarely in the cross hairs of the revitalised temperance crusade. The Methodist

Church was an influential force in Manx life until the 1970s and had the confessional allegiance of many MHKs. One MHK claimed in 1958 that ‘the Methodist vote hangs over the heads of the politicians in the Isle of Man like an H-bomb’.<sup>106</sup> A Wesleyan streak pervaded Manx elite culture and continued to resonate among rural Manx people engaged in farming and fishing. The time scale of Manx secularisation closely paralleled that of Britain, but local politicians, many of whom were informed by religious sensibilities, were in a position to offer a more robust legislative defence against declining Christian values.<sup>107</sup>

For many visitors, drinking was a favourite holiday pastime. Drunkenness developed into a popular starting point for the Manx press to debate the cultural differences of visitors, eclipsing the sober (or at least well-behaved) conduct of the vast majority whilst on holiday. Manx licensing laws prohibited Sunday opening, but for the rest of the week pubs were permitted to serve alcohol far longer than their British counterparts. Until 1964, British licensed premises were bound by the 1921 Licensing Act, which permitted sales for 8 hours from 11 am to 10 pm – with a 2-hour break in the afternoon.<sup>108</sup> Longer Manx weekday opening hours proved a significant draw for day-trippers from northern industrial cities. Isle of Man stockbroker Robert Scott recalled with disdain that ‘people used to come over on the boat just for the day to drink’.<sup>109</sup> Manx licensing hours were advertised prominently in British newspapers. The *Glasgow Daily Record* emphasised ‘the pleasure of almost continental drinking times (13 hours daily in the Isle of Man)’ in an attempt to entice thirsty Scots.<sup>110</sup> Despite permitting long opening hours that suggested a relaxed attitude to drink, a strong temperance culture survived well into the 1960s, spearheaded by the Methodist Church and allies in the House of Keys.

The lack of non-religious Sunday recreation frustrated many holidaymakers. As early as 1955, a government report noted that regarding the issue of Sunday opening ‘local opinions must be somewhat subordinated to the requirement of visitors’.<sup>111</sup> Speaking to the *Isle of Man Examiner* in 1956, Mr Friel, a tourist from Dublin, expressed a common criticism: ‘what do they expect us to do on Sundays – sit and twiddle our thumbs? I want to go out and meet people, and the best way to do that is in a pub’.<sup>112</sup> Tynwald members with a finger on the pulse of holidaymaker opinion spoke of the need to ‘reject the present suicidal policy of ignoring the comfort and desires of the visitor’.<sup>113</sup> Their parliamentary opponents were equally forceful. J.L. Callister MHK warned that ‘by condoning the misuse of Sunday we will, all of us, be committing a moral sin’.<sup>114</sup> The desire of many visitors for a Sunday pint rode roughshod over traditional Manx values and Sabbatarian instincts, pitching Manx politicians into a fierce battle over the issue of licensing liberalisation.

Interestingly, alcohol sales were permitted (to residents only) in certain large licensed hotels on Sundays. The toleration of Sunday drinking in such establishments, beyond the financial grasp of the working-class holidaymaker, also revealed stark class prejudice. Some MHKs noted the double standard of effectively endorsing middle-class alcoholic consumption on Sundays, on the grounds that it was (presumably) more restrained. Jack Nivison MHK pointed out the injustice of ‘a law for the rich and a law for the poor’.<sup>115</sup> The fear that the working classes would be unable to restrain themselves on Sundays infused debates. After much political wrangling, Tynwald passed a compromise Act in 1960. Limited Sunday opening was permitted during the peak summer season, but the sanctity of the Manx Sabbath was preserved during the rest



of the year when the island was largely bereft of visitors. Only in 1977 did year-round Sunday opening gain parliamentary assent.

Contempt for holidaymakers and fears about Manx cultural dilution was also expressed by some visitors. Oswald Blakeston, a poet and regular visitor to the island, described Douglas in the magazine *Time and Tide* as a town ‘victimised by trippers, the stolid adherents of the High Tea and HP sauce age ... the Manx realise that the trippers are now essential for the island’s economy ... but tolerance for them does not mean Manxmen will accept any imposition from “across”’.<sup>116</sup> Anthropologist David Glyn Nixon elaborates this concept, arguing that some Manx people viewed the ‘tourist as an obnoxious interloper to be tolerated for a limited time’ and identifies a ‘barrier between tourist society and island society’.<sup>117</sup> Friendly tolerance, tinged with occasional jealousy – but not outright hostility – towards holidaymakers was the most commonly expressed sentiment found in oral testimony. Douglas bank manager Robert Clague recalled that the primary source of Manx jealousy was being ‘surrounded by comparatively high-spending people’; the conspicuous consumption of visitors was ‘a bit contagious’ resulting in some locals living beyond their means and approaching the bank for financial assistance.<sup>118</sup> Whilst cultural anxiety ran high among Manx elites and visiting cultural anthropologists, for most residents, particularly the thousands dependent on tourism and regularly interacting with holidaymakers, moneyed visitors were welcomed with open arms.

For the most part the visiting public intermingled with locals without friction and noted (with some curiosity) Manx culture and history. The overwhelming majority of oral history interviewees remembered the rapport struck up between themselves and guest house owners, with repeat visitors expressing sentiments similar to Nottinghamshire holidaymaker David Curtis: ‘It was like being with friends at home in many ways.’<sup>119</sup> The Hodson family enjoyed staying at Gansey cottage, Port St. Mary, so much that they repeated the routine for 19 years until the owners retired. Graham Hodson recalled ‘my dad saying: “Goodbye, see you next year. Fifty weeks next Sunday we’ll be back on the car ferry with the Wolseley!”’<sup>120</sup> Vivid memories of conflict between boarding-house keepers and their guests, examples of which crop up in oral testimony, perhaps stems from the fact that ‘archival memory’ – that which is stored and regularly rehearsed – often reflects memories which possess emotional charge.<sup>121</sup> The typically harmonious (and sometimes long-lasting) relationships forged between hoteliers and holidaymakers constitutes mundane memory, yet difficult to recall in detail.

By virtue of its geographic position, the Isle of Man was the summer playground for people from across Britain and Ireland. A *Daily Express* journalist covering the 1973 Summerland fire, in which 50 holidaymakers died, noted the ‘sheer hubbub of accents – Ulster, Lancashire, Glasgow, and the Home Counties’.<sup>122</sup> Oral testimony reveals that Manx boarding-house keepers displayed regional preferences, and ranked visitors from certain areas above others. Douglas landlady Megan Creer stated unequivocally that ‘you always had trouble with the Scottish people because they were very heavy drinkers’.<sup>123</sup> The Lancashire working class seem to have elicited the warmest welcome. Albert and June Hope remarked that their Lancashire guests ‘would come up the stairs and say: “Eee, that’s grand love” ... [compared with] the people from London [who] would arrive and they would inspect ... they were fine but they weren’t the Northerners’.<sup>124</sup>

Irish holidaymakers were also popular among boarding-house keepers. Hebert Quirk spoke of his ‘love [for] the Irish, the font of all jokes’.<sup>125</sup> Belfast visitors in particular were



remembered as being 'always drunk from the morning right through, but never bad with it'.<sup>126</sup> Albert Hope's only criticism was their colourful language: 'bearing in mind that fuck is part of the language in Northern Ireland ... I had to pull them up once or twice and remind them that there were lady guests also in the bar'.<sup>127</sup> From the early 1970s, with much of Northern Ireland enveloped in sectarian strife, hotel proprietors Gordon and Joy Birnie alleged that 'the Irish weren't very welcome at that time ... they [proprietors] thought they were going to get trouble'.<sup>128</sup> No evidence of discrimination was found in holidaymaker oral testimony; although hoteliers were likely aware of rumours that paramilitaries escaped to the Isle of Man when circumstances in Ulster demanded.

## Conclusion

The post-war holiday provides a useful backdrop for examining stereotypes surrounding leisure and the interplay between class and culture in post-war Britain. This article adopted the two core themes of youth, class and identity, but gender could have been equally useful. Several landladies spoke of their husbands smouldering at their economic autonomy, especially if household revenue from boarders exceeded that brought home by the male breadwinner.<sup>129</sup> Specific analysis of the female holidaymaking experience would be a valuable contribution to debates on post-war gender roles. For many women, holidaymaking was often constrained by expectations to fulfil usual domestic duties.<sup>130</sup> Leisure historiography would benefit from detailed exploration of this theme.

Despite its small size, the Isle of Man accommodated holidaymakers from diverse generational, socio-economic and regional backgrounds with minimal friction. This was achieved through spatial separation, monitoring and defending the prevailing tone of individual resorts. The relatively affluent post-war working classes were welcomed to the island, but were not permitted to make a conspicuous cultural imprint beyond the confines of Douglas. Contrary to cultural expectations, some working-class holidaymakers gravitated towards quieter resorts, consciously eliding the commercialised leisure offerings in the Manx capital. Post-war social commentators defined such preferences, which found their roots long before the 'age of affluence', as evidence of a nascent classless culture brought about by the embourgeoisement of a 'new' working class.<sup>131</sup> The sheer diversity of working-class holiday leisure pursuits cemented the 'rough' and 'respectable' self-identification encoded in home communities.

Political self-determination enabled the Isle of Man to control the social atmosphere of its resorts to a far greater extent than seaside local governments in the UK. Moral panic about teenage permissiveness merged with fears about the erosion of the Isle of Man's respectability as a holiday resort and triggered a swift, punitive and unique response. Even on holiday, argued in this article, youths remained quiescent and largely culturally conformist. Although initially observed with envy by British seaside towns suffering from the ill effects of juvenile crime, by the 1970s the use of judicial corporal punishment to deal with holiday hooliganism tarnished the Isle of Man's image. Birching was eventually repealed after a high-profile European human rights case in 1978.<sup>132</sup> By this time, however, the Isle of Man had gained the reputation of a staid resort, climatically disadvantaged and largely bereft of continental holiday excitement. Slowness to modernise – apart from a few flagship projects such as the indoor Summerland leisure complex – meant that youths simply moved elsewhere to get their kicks.

Parallel analysis of tourist behaviour and the perception of visitors by locals provides a deeper understanding of holidaymaking from the resort resident perspective. In this respect the Isle of Man is a particularly rich case study, shifting the focus away from the usual British seaside case studies. Motivated by a complex blend of cultural, moral and economic anxiety, Tynwald constrained holidaymaking activities that offended 'traditional' Manx values. The Sunday licensing debate exacerbated fissures in Manx society and exposed underlying cultural tensions caused by tourism. Manx nationalists increasingly cast their ethnic identity against that of the working-class tourist. The presence of thousands of summer visitors from around the British Isles kindled a sense of Manx national identity, even among those receptive towards holidaymakers. The 'othering' of holidaymakers by resort residents nurtured, rather than eradicated (predicted by nationalists), Manx cultural distinctiveness and stimulated greater awareness of regional/national differences. These issues, as John Belchem has argued, have yet to capture the interest of historians and await in-depth 'historical deconstruction', but this article has hopefully fired a starting gun.<sup>133</sup>

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## Notes on contributor

*Pete Hodson* is completing the final year of his PhD in History, based at Queen's University Belfast. His thesis is titled 'Memory, conflict and class: the experience and legacy of deindustrialisation in Belfast and North East England'. His primary research interests are deindustrialisation, working-class culture and oral history methodology.